

# Weekly Market Bulletin

State of New Hampshire  
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## **From Your Commissioner...**

### **Woodchip Fuel Saves School District Big Money**

Here's something that ought to get state legislators and local government officials interested:

The Hanover school district this past winter spent less than \$10,000 for woodchips to heat a new elementary school. Had it used No. 2 heating oil instead the fuel bill would have been about \$55,000.

John Aubin, business manager for the district, says that when the decision was made to go with a woodchip boiler back during the design stage, the prevailing contract price for fuel oil was under \$1 a gallon. At that price the woodchip alternative had a payback of about seven years.

But with oil now more than twice as expensive the wood-fired boiler system will pay for itself in half that time.

"We're saving a ton of money," Aubin says. "and it's good for the forests to clean out low quality wood and it means a market for loggers, too."

Technology has evolved rapidly in the woodchip boiler field lately, with simple, efficient American-made systems now readily available. The Hanover installation has the trailer loads of chips disgorged into a hopper which connects to a conveyor that feeds the fuel into the boiler's firebox.

In addition to Hanover, the Merrimack Valley School District in Penacook is installing a woodchip heating system to serve two adjacent classroom facilities. Vermont is pushing woodchip heating for school buildings with offers of 90 percent state aid and now has 20 schools switched away from oil onto biofuel.

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Amid the excessive amount of cloudy, damp weather this spring one positive aspect of the season stands out, and that's the tremendous blooms seen on lilacs all over the state. For size, color and fragrance this has been a great year for our official state flower.

Longtime UNH plant scientist and lilac expert Dr. Owen Rogers agrees it's been quite a year, but he's not sure just exactly why.

"Just what makes this year different I don't know, but if you look at some other flowering plants as well it's an outstanding spring. Rhododendron, for example, is having a very heavy bloom," Rogers says.

"The question is: will they have the gumption to do as well next year? A good many of these plants are biennial bearing."

Rogers advises studying catalogs and nursery information sheets to determine which lilac varieties tend toward biennial flowering and which perform every year. And he notes that by choosing different strains it's now possible to enjoy lilac color and fragrance from May 10 to July 1 under New Hampshire conditions.

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The state Agricultural Advisory Board spent a day recently visiting some interesting operations in the Strafford County area. The tour started at Flag Hill Winery and Distillery in Lee, where owner Frank Reinhold explained the development of the vineyard, the science of winemaking and the recent establishment of a distillery to produce vodka and other spirits from New Hampshire apple cider.

Flag Hill is deep into agritourism, too, with the vineyard a venue for wedding receptions and private functions for crowds from 100 to 250. The wedding calendar is all sold out for this season and filling fast for 2007. Tours are welcomed, and the farm has joined forces with four other nearby businesses to handle visitors by the busload.

Producing alcoholic beverages for the commercial market means lots of paperwork, Reinhold says. He employs one person fulltime preparing some 23 different filings and compliance reports for state and federal regulatory agencies.

Later the board visited the New England Equine Medical and Surgical Center in Dover, a spanking new facility serving clients from as far away as New Jersey and eastern Canada. The core of the practice is performance and show horses, with racehorses and pleasure horses each a minor part of the work that a staff of 20 surgeons, technicians and support people performs

Additional stops included Meader Supply in Rochester, which sells harness, horseshoes and tack to draft horse customers across the country and around the world, and BerryBrook Farm in Farmington, which likewise has a global reach for its complete line of gear for the working steer and oxen community. Les Barden, a draft horse authority, explained the fine points of the traditional New England D-ring harness, and Artie and Cathy Scruton outlined their nutrient management strategies on their 170-cow dairy.

Griff Burnap of Butternut Farm explained his operation's goal of having at least one fruit crop available for pick-your-own customers continuously from June through October. Strawberries, raspberries, blues, peaches and apples draw people from a radius of up to 25 miles. Drip irrigation is a key part of the growing scheme at his farm.

**Steve Taylor, Commissioner**